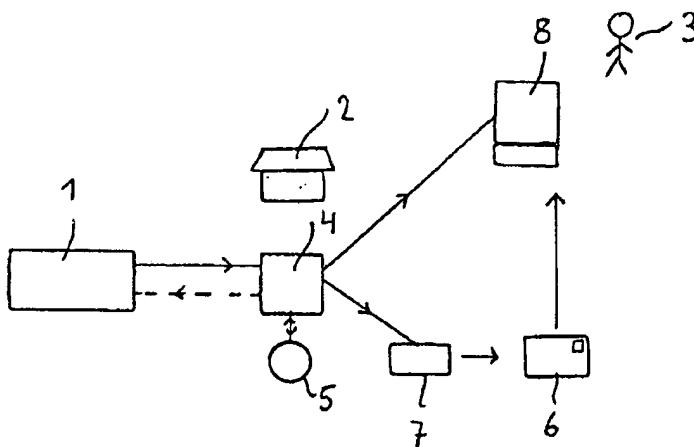




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁷ : G06F 12/60	A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/68801 (43) International Publication Date: 16 November 2000 (16.11.00)
<p>(21) International Application Number: PCT/SE00/00853</p> <p>(22) International Filing Date: 3 May 2000 (03.05.00)</p> <p>(30) Priority Data: 9901644-6 6 May 1999 (06.05.99) SE</p> <p>(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): POSTEN AB [SE/SE]; S-105 00 Stockholm (SE).</p> <p>(72) Inventor; and (75) Inventor/Applicant (for US only): JOSEFSSON, Annika [SE/SE]; Söderberga Allé 15, S-162 51 Vällingby (SE).</p> <p>(74) Agents: ÖRTENBLAD, Bertil et al.; Noréns Patentbyrå AB, Box 10198, S-100 55 Stockholm (SE).</p>	<p>(81) Designated States: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).</p> <p>Published With international search report. In English translation (filed in Swedish).</p>	

(54) Title: METHOD FOR DISTRIBUTING MAIL



(57) Abstract

A method of sending mail by means of electronic mail, wherein a sender (1) supplies information as to the mail volume to be sent, such as addressees (3) and mail contents, on data media to a receiver (2) who shall send the mail to the addressees. The invention is characterized by feeding the contents of said data media into a computer system (4) in which the addressees (3) are compared with a register that includes information as to whether or not respective addressees (3) have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system (4) to send the mail items concerned by electronic mail to addressees that have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system (4) to sort out as physical mail (6) remaining addressees to which mail items shall be sent; and upon expiration of a predetermined time period from when unanswered electronic mail was sent causing the computer system (4) to sort out such addressees (3) for the purpose of sending a mail item by physical mail.

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METHOD FOR DISTRIBUTING MAIL

The present invention relates to a method of sending mail.

5 It has become more usual to send mail to an addressee electronically. It would be particularly beneficial if bills and other printed matter were to be mailed by electronic mail. In this regard, a sender could deliver information concerning addresses and mail contents on data media to
10 Posten Sverige AB (Swedish Post Office Department), which could then send the mail to respective addressees on the basis of its knowledge of their e-mail addresses.

One problem in this regard is whether or not the e-mail
15 addresses of the addressees are known and whether or not the addressees wish to receive electronic mail.

Another important problem that arises when wishing to send bills or invoices for instance to private individuals via e-
20 mail is that there is no way to check whether the addressee reads his/her e-mail regularly, makes payments by means of his/her personal computer, prints out bills or invoices when necessary, etc., as distinct from a physical letter sent by standard mail. It is assumed that a letter will be delivered
25 to the addressee and that the addressee will open and read his/her mail.

These problems are solved by means of the present invention, which relates to a method of greatly facilitating the use of
30 e-mail for sending mail of the kind which the addressee can be expected to answer.

The present invention thus relates to a method of sending mail by electronic mail where a sender delivers information relating to the volume of mail to be sent, such as the addressees and contents of the mail, on data media to a receiver which shall send the mail to the addressees, and is characterised by feeding the contents of said data media into a computer system in which the addressees are compared with a register that includes information that discloses whether or not respective addressees have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system to send respective dispatches by electronic mail to addressees that have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system to sort out remaining addressees to which mail shall be sent as physical mail; and subsequent to the passage of a predetermined period of time from the time at which electronic mail was sent but has still not been answered, causing the computer system to sort out such addressees and to send thereto a corresponding dispatch by physical mail.

The invention will now be described in more detail partly with reference to an exemplifying embodiment of the invention shown on the accompanying drawing, in which

- Figure 1 is a simple block diagram which is intended to illustrate the invention.

The present invention relates to a method of sending dispatches by electronic mail. By electronic mail is meant so called e-mail that is sent over the Internet or over some corresponding network. Different appropriate authorisation codes may be included.

A sender 1 delivers information concerning the volume of mail to be sent, such as addressees and content, on data media to a receiver 2 that functions to send the mail to the addressees 3.

5

The sender may be a company who wishes to send bills or invoices to its customers, who then become the addressees. Naturally, the volume of mail may, instead, comprise different tenders, order confirmations, different types of document, such as partially completed declaration forms, etc. However, the invention is primarily useful to companies that wish to send an item of mail to a large number of addressees.

15 The invention is exemplified below with reference to a gasoline company who wishes to bill companies and private individuals for the purchase of gasoline at filling stations by means of a credit card. It will be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to this area of use.

20

The gasoline company makes out at regular time intervals a number of bills that are to be sent to credit card owners for payment.

25 The sender 1, i.e. the gasoline company, sends information concerning the volume of mail, i.e. the bills, to be sent, such as addressees and the contents of respective bills, on data media to the receiver 2 that shall send the mail to the addressees 3. The receiver may suitably be Posten Sverige AB.

30

According to the invention, the contents of said data media are entered into a computer system 4 belonging to the

receiver. The addressees are compared with a register in the database 5 of the computer system that contains information as to whether respective addressees have an e-mail address or not. The database may also include information as to whether or not an addressee wishes to receive certain mail as e-mail and certain other mail as physical mail.

The computer system 4 is then caused to send the mail concerned by e-mail to those addressees that have an e-mail address. For instance, the e-mail is sent to the personal computer 8 of the addressee 3 via the Internet. The computer system 4 is also caused to sort out remaining addressees to which the mail shall be sent as physical mail 6, this mail then passing through standard mail routines.

When physical mail is to be sent, the computer system 4 is caused to print out the dispatches by means of a printer 7.

According to the invention, when a predetermined period of time has passed from the time at which unanswered e-mail was first sent, the computer system 4 is caused to sort out such addressees and to send the corresponding e-mail as physical mail 6.

The physical mail is suitably sent as a mail item whose content corresponds to the content of the mail item sent by electronic mail. Instead, a bill or invoice reminder can be sent by physical mail.

By the word answered is meant that the addressee has been in contact with the sender with regard to the mail item concerned. In the case of a bill, this contact will normally

mean that payment is made. The sender informs the receiver that contact has been made or has not been made, after said predetermined time period has expired.

- 5 This is effected by causing the computer system 4 to receive from the sender information concerning those addressees that have answered their mail.

10 A large majority of the credit card owners is reached by first sending the mail item by electronic mail. Some of these credit card owners pay their respective bills within the allotted time period, whereas others do not. Those credit card owners who have not said that they are willing to receive electronic mail, are sent their bills or invoices
15 conventionally by physical mail. Some of this latter group will also pay in time, whereas others do not.

The predetermined time period that shall have passed from when unanswered electronic mail was sent may, of course, vary
20 depending on the type of mail concerned. In the case of bills or invoices issued by a gasoline company, an appropriate time may be when the standard payment term expires. In this case, the addressees are sent by physical post a reminder that includes a copy of the bill. Similarly, the same kind of
25 reminder can be sent to those who have already received the first mail item by physical post.

Consequently, many mail items, namely the electronic mail items, are less expensive and simpler to send, and a reminder
30 referring to unanswered or unpaid items will be sent automatically together with reminders to those who have not received electronic mail.

According to one highly preferred embodiment of the invention, the computer system 4 includes a database 5 which includes physical addresses and e-mail addresses of addressees who have expressed a wish to receive electronic post.

Consequently, the anticipated response frequency to electronic mail will be much higher than when electronic mail addresses have been obtained from different sources.

The problems mentioned in the introduction are solved by the present invention.

Although the invention has been described above with reference to exemplifying embodiments thereof, it will be understood that the person skilled in this art will be able to modify the invention to accommodate different types of mail items. For instance, physical post can be sent to an addressee who wishes to receive e-mail, after said addressee has been sent a reminder by e-mail.

The invention is therefore not limited to the aforescribed embodiments thereof, since variations can be made within the scope of the accompanying Claims.

CLAIMS

1. A method of sending mail by means of electronic mail, wherein a sender (1) supplies information as to the mail
5 volume to be sent, such as addressees (3) and mail contents, on data media to a receiver (2) who shall send the mail to the addressees, **characterised** by feeding the contents of said data media into a computer system (4) in which the addressees (3) are compared with a register that includes information as
10 to whether or not respective addressees (3) have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system (4) to send the mail items concerned by electronic mail to addressees that have an electronic mail address; causing the computer system (4) to sort out as physical mail (6)
15 remaining addressees to which mail items shall be sent; and upon expiration of a predetermined time period from when unanswered electronic mail was sent causing the computer system (4) to sort out such addressees (3) for the purpose of sending a mail item by physical mail.

20

2. A method according to Claim 1, **characterised** in that the computer system (4) includes a database (5) which is caused to contain physical addresses and the electronic mail addresses of addressees who have expressed a wish to receive
25 electronic mail.

3. A method according to Claim 1 or 2, **characterised** by causing the computer system (4) to receive from the sender information relating to those addressees who have answered
30 their mail.

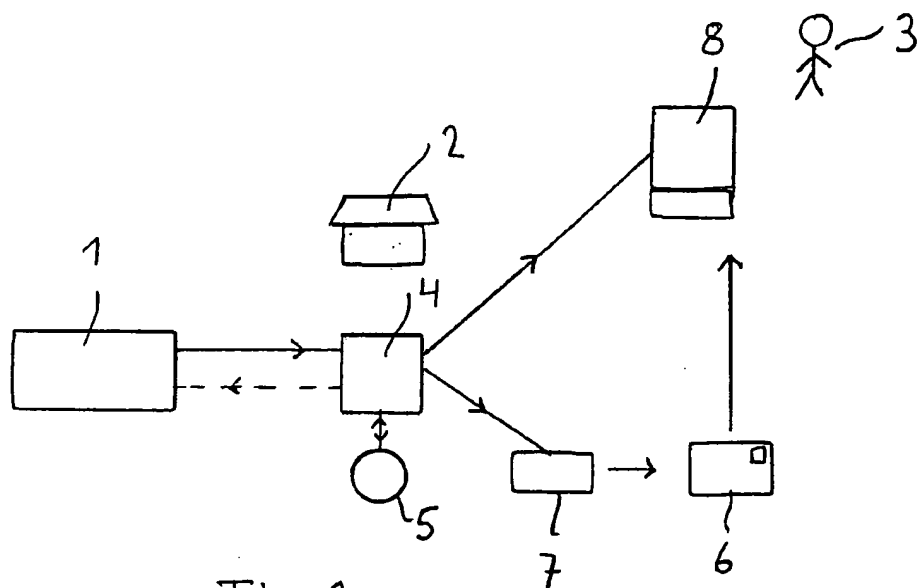


Fig 1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/SE 00/00853

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC7: G06F 12/60

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC7: G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

SE,DK,FI,NO classes as above

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5699528 A (E.J. HOGAN), 16 December 1997 (16.12.97)	1-3
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A	US 5832460 A (G.M. BEDNAR ET AL), 3 November 1998 (03.11.98)	
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A	WO 9910823 A1 (CITIBANK, N.A.), 4 March 1999 (04.03.99)	
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☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☒ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
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"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

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Name and mailing address of the ISA: Swedish Patent Office Box 5055, S-102 42 STOCKHOLM Facsimile No. +46 8 666 02 86	Authorized officer Christer Wendenius / MRO Telephone No. +46 8 782 25 00

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

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International application No.

PCT/SE 00/00853

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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US 5832460 A	03/11/98	CA 2173713 A CN 1141454 A EP 0745947 A	03/12/96 29/01/97 04/12/96
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